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REPS. MARKEY, SHAYS, MALONEY PUSH FOR CARGO SCREENING ON PASSENGER PLANES

Lawmakers want passenger notification on planes carrying uninspected cargo

Washington, D.C. – Representatives Ed Markey (D-MA) and Christopher Shays (R-CT), senior members of the Homeland Security Committee, and Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), Co-Chair with Shays of the 9/11 Caucus, today announced their intention to offer amendments to the Department of Homeland Security's authorization bill to require the inspection of all cargo before it is transported on passenger planes. Currently, almost none of the cargo carried on passenger planes is inspected for explosives or other dangerous materials prior to being loaded onboard.

The lawmakers were joined at a press conference today by representatives of the Coalition of Airline Pilots Associations, the Association of Flight Attendants and Mary Fetchet, Founder of Voices of September 11th, Mother of Brad, 24.

The Representatives will introduce two amendments to H.R. 1817, the Homeland Security Department's Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006, to close this cargo security loophole. The first amendment will direct the Department of Homeland Security to establish a system to inspect cargo transported on passenger aircraft, requiring that 100% of cargo is screened by 2008. According to this amendment, 35 % of cargo must be inspected by the end of Fiscal Year 2006, 65% of cargo by the end of Fiscal Year 2007, and 100% of cargo by the end of Fiscal Year 2008. The second amendment will require the Department of Homeland Security to notify passengers when unscreened cargo is being carried in the cargo hold of an aircraft to ensure that passengers are informed about this security risk.

"Three and a half years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it is unacceptable that freight stored in the cargo bay beneath passengers' feet is almost never inspected for bombs that could bring down the plane. Passengers empty their pockets, take off their shoes, and walk through security checkpoints while cargo is placed on the very same planes without being inspected. We know that Al Qaeda continues to put aircraft near the top of its terrorist target list. Failure to inspect all of the cargo that is transported on passenger planes provides terrorists with an opportunity to carry out another 9/11-style attack, and we must take action now to close this dangerous loophole," said Rep. Markey.

"Air cargo is routinely inspected in several other nations and, given that the U.S. is target number one, we can no longer afford to roll the dice," Shays said. "I think we owe it to all families who have lost loved ones in acts of terrorism to make our airlines as safe as we can. If we cannot screen cargo, then passengers deserve to know their safety is being compromised," said Rep. Shays.

"If you ask the American people whether cargo riding with them on airplanes should be screened, they would emphatically say yes. And then they'd wonder why Congress isn't doing anything," said Maloney, Co-Chair of the 9/11 Caucus.

"Securing all cargo carried aboard commercial airlines is a very achievable goal. The technology exists right now to screen this cargo. These systems provide an accurate picture of 'what is in the box' and do not impede the flow of commerce. We appreciate the courageous stand of these lawmakers on this vital issue, and CAPA stands squarely behind you as you continue to fight for one level of security," said Paul Onorato, Vice-President of the Coalition of Airline Pilots Associations.

"For our members, the first victims of the horrible September 11th attacks, doing everything possible to make sure that our aviation system is the most secure in the world is of the utmost concern. The aircraft is our workplace and we believe that all actions must be taken to ensure that every aircraft is protected from every possible form of attack. The loopholes that exist in cargo screening must be addressed to protect the flying public and those that make their livelihood working on those aircraft," said Patricia A. Friend, International President, Association of Flight Attendants.

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"Our government officials know what our vulnerabilities are, and regrettably so do our enemies. By shirking their responsibility to do everything in their power to keep the Americans safe domestically, these officials are risking another 9/11. We know from Israel and other countries that technology exists that is capable of screening all cargo on American airplanes. The Department of Homeland Security must devote the resources necessary to make this a reality. Making security decisions based on cost analysis is unacceptable - we can no longer afford to gamble with American lives," said Mary Fetchet.

Air cargo is routinely inspected in Israel, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Currently, airlines check packages through their "Known Shipper" program, which simply means, if a business has shipped over 24 times since 9/1/99 on the same carrier, their cargo can be included in passenger planes without screening. In September 2003 an employee of a Known Shipper exploited the program to ship himself from New York to Texas. TSA has conceded that it hasn't audited most of the known shippers in its database. Packages weighing less than 16 ounces aren't subject to the Known Shipper program, despite the fact that the bomb that brought down Pan-Am Flight 103 contained less than 16 ounces of explosives.

"Un-inspected cargo is a clear and present danger to our aviation system. This unacceptable security risk must be addressed to protect passengers, crew members, and all Americans who could be victimized by another terrorist attack that uses an aircraft to strike our country again," Rep. Markey concluded.

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